

## Review Essay Series

# Growing Up in Kansas

by Pamela Riney-Kehrberg

### EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Family and children's issues, especially as they relate to poverty, health care, and education, moved to the fore of the nation's turn-of-the-twenty-first-century domestic social and political dialogue. Thus, it should come as no surprise that children and childhood also became the focus of considerable scholarly attention during this same era. And it seems appropriate that *Kansas History's* review essay series should continue with an examination of the field of children's history in Kansas and the West. In "Growing Up in Kansas," a worthy addition to that ongoing series, Iowa State University historian Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, who recently turned her own scholarly attention toward children and families in the Plains, concludes that, with a very few exceptions, "the history of childhood in Kansas is a history yet to be written."

In the opening lines of her essay, Professor Riney-Kehrberg observes, "The experience of being a child and growing up is as nearly a universal one as human beings

**T**he experience of being a child and growing up is as nearly a universal one as human beings have, but despite the centrality and importance of childhood, it is a topic that has only recently been of great interest to historians. The field of children's history is approximately forty years old, dating to the 1962 publication of Phillipe Aries's *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, a work about childhood in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Since its "discovery," the field of children's history has grown in fits and starts, little reflecting how important the topic is to the larger social history of human life. How children live their formative years has an enormous impact on who they are in later life. The individuals, institutions, and experiences with which children come into contact leave marks (and often scars) on the adults they become, for good or for evil. Given the enormous implications of an understanding of childhood, a reader might expect to find an equally enormous body of literature, detailing its historical experience in the world, the United States, and individual states, such as Kansas. That reader, however, would be disappointed. The history of childhood and growing up in the United States is an emerging field, but one where little work has been done beyond the coasts and large urban centers. Aside from a few good and useful books telling a partial story, the history of childhood in Kansas is a history yet to be written.

From the perspective of Kansas and other midwestern and western states, an ideal history of childhood would encompass both the urban and the rural experi-

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1. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

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*An unidentified family of southwestern Kansas, ca. 1920.*

have, but despite the centrality and importance of childhood, it is a topic that has only recently been of great interest to historians." Riney-Kehrberg, the author of several fine books and articles on depression-era Kansas, among other things, guides the reader through the relevant but relatively scarce literature on this subject while speculating on the nature of the "ideal history of childhood," providing a working "definition of childhood," and discussing the "difficulties of writing the history of children"—that is, the dearth of and unique "problems with source material." She also analyzes the problematic nature of some of the histories, such as those focusing on education that purport to be about children's experiences, and demonstrates that the history of rural children is the most neglected of all. "Perhaps the one exception," writes Riney-Kehrberg, "is the history of one- and two-room country schools, the seeming quaintness of which attracts Americans dreaming of earlier days and supposedly simpler times."

The series' objective is to assess the existing literature and to suggest new avenues for research and writing. With regard to the former, Professor Riney-Kehrberg informs us that "much has been done" on the history of growing up, but "much also remains to be done," especially as it relates to efforts that seek out the sources that really "bring the voices and experiences of childhood" into the work. Our hope is that the author's contribution to the review essay series will encourage and guide a new effort to fill the void so that ultimately Kansas history will include more of "the lived history of children" as well as of adults.

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ence. An ideal history would acknowledge, too, that the experiences of youngsters in small towns and small cities might be far different than those of youngsters in larger cities. It would tell the story of children's relationships to institutions, such as schools, churches, orphanages, and courts, but from the perspective of the children, rather than the adults in charge. A complete history would acknowledge and explore the differing experiences of both boys and girls, the rich and poor, and various ethnic and racial groupings. This new and improved history of growing up would explore children as multifaceted human beings who worked, played, studied, and participated in family life, and whose experience of all of these things may have been far different from the perceptions of the adults surrounding and supervising them. While such a work would be immensely useful, it is also among the more difficult stories to research and tell.

**B**efore delving into the available literature on American childhood, or growing up in Kansas, it is necessary to establish a definition of childhood. In my own work on farm childhood, I have generally used that term to encompass the experiences of youngsters from birth until the age of twenty-one. I have chosen to think of childhood in broad terms, since the word cannot be defined with any precision in the context of turn-of-the-century rural communities. The term "teenager" had yet to be invented, and many young people well into their teens and early twenties, physically mature and no longer in school, remained at home, working for their parents. As I write about childhood in this essay, I will be including many young people who today we would think of as teenagers, adolescents, or young adults. I do this because so many of them would have been thought of as children in the communities within which they lived, and because the "growing up" experience includes not just the period prior to puberty, but all of the years leading up to full membership in adult society. Because of issues of source availability, the bulk of sources about growing up are in fact written by or about youngsters between twelve and twenty-one, those years when young people are most likely to generate documents about themselves and come into contact with institutions that might record their activities.

This essay also requires a discussion of the difficulties of writing the history of children. Because of problems with source material, writing about many aspects of children's lives is difficult, if not impossible. The sources that historians most value are those that allow us to examine lived experience straight from the individual involved in the moment. Even as we write about adults, and particularly certain classes of adults, that can be a problem. Uneducated women, for example, often did not leave records of their lives. Writing diaries and letters was generally a habit of the well-educated middle and upper classes.<sup>2</sup> Slaves, because of laws forbidding them to learn to read and write, also generally did not leave letters and diaries.<sup>3</sup> Children, too, are one of those groups for which documentation can be scant to nonexistent. Until children went to school, they generally nei-

2. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. See, for example, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, ed., *Waiting on the Bounty: The Dust Bowl Diary of Mary Knackstedt Dyck* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

3. This, however, has not prevented a recent history of slave childhood from being written. See Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

ther read nor wrote, leaving only close relatives and other care givers to document their activities. Many parents, however, did little to document their own activities, let alone those of small children. Once they were literate, children could begin to document their lives, but it was the rare child under the age of twelve who left a written record, in the form of letters or a journal. Written records become more common for those twelve and older, but still they are rare. They certainly do not appear in the archives in the numbers available for adults. It appears that children were either less likely to record their lives than were adults, or that once people became adults, they were likely to destroy those early writings. Even the kind of people who grow up to be historians may be guilty of having destroyed childhood diaries out of embarrassment for their young and seemingly foolish selves.<sup>4</sup> Those who kept diaries, too, were unlikely to record the kind of information that enquiring minds a century later might want to know.

The historical experience of puberty, for example, remains largely unrecorded because of the modesty of young diary writers.<sup>5</sup> In relative terms it is easy to know how educators, parents, and physicians believed youngsters *should* experience this transition—the advice literature abounds—but it is quite another thing to know how a youngster actually experienced this transformation. For example, historians Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, compiling their work *Frontier Children*, found a great deal of evidence on the puberty ceremonies of western tribes such as the Cheyenne and Navajo but relatively little firsthand information about puberty among white settlers, who did not mark the occasion with ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> The traditional, adult-formulated ritual was accessible to historians, while the youngster's experience, largely, was not. The task of writing a history of growing up requires that the researcher piece together any number of sources available from children, such as their letters and diaries, with sources emanating from those people and institutions that came into contact with children, such as parents, teachers, schools, the courts, researchers, and reformers. Memoirs and other types of reminiscences may also be added to the mix, with the understanding that time may affect the quality, the quantity, and the interpretation of a person's recollections of growing up.<sup>7</sup> In the end, the scholar may or may not have enough information to make informed observations about children's family relationships, work, play, or school experiences. Given these restrictions on the historian's activities, it is no wonder that the available secondary and primary historical resources on growing up in Kansas are limited.

By far the most obvious, and often earliest, place in which the history of childhood was recorded was in the history of educational institutions. More than a

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4. I destroyed my own first diary, as did Joan Jacobs Brumberg, a historian who has written about girlhood by making use of the diaries of adolescents and young adults. See Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), xxvi.

5. *Ibid.*, xxvii.

6. Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Frontier Children* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 137–41.

7. Some scholars are quite critical of memoirs as historical sources. Liahna Babener has charged that memoirs of midwestern rural childhood should be read for their subtexts, rather than their more obvious messages, and that much pain and hardship has been painted over with nostalgia. See Liahna Babener, "Bitter Nostalgia: Recollections of Childhood on the Midwestern Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*, ed. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 301–20.



*By far the most obvious place in which the history of childhood was recorded is in the history of our schools. But more often than not, it is the history of the educational facility rather than a collection of the youngsters' experiences. Pictured here are schoolboys in Jefferson County, ca. 1900.*

hundred years ago, for example, educators in Kansas collected information about their schools for the 1893 Columbian Exposition.<sup>8</sup> Generally, early histories show the development in local or state interest in education, chart the spread and growth of schools, and highlight the careers of noted educators. Education may very well have been, and may continue to be, that aspect of child life best understood by and most accessible to adults. It was legislated by adults, planned and scripted by adults, and carried into the classroom either by adults or older children who had been made, by virtue of a teaching contract, surrogate adults. Because of the important role adults played in this whole process, it was a subject historians easily understood and easily documented. And because of that, most histories of education are questionable sources of information about the history of childhood. More often than not, it is the history of an institution rather than the history of the youngsters' experiences of education.

Only recently have scholars very successfully incorporated the child's eye view of education into formal histories of the schools. Education professor Paul Theobald's book *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* incorporates a strong discussion of the children's experiences of school in a chapter entitled "Recess, Recitation, and the Switch."<sup>9</sup> Thad Sitton and Milam C. Rowold, in *Ringling the Children In: Texas Country Schools*, have made extensive use of oral histories, memoirs, and letters in formulating a history of the common schools. Because of their access to the materials of the Texas Common Schools Project of the School of Education at the University of Texas at Austin, their story rings as clearly with the voices and concerns of the children who experienced education as with the adults who planned and executed it.<sup>10</sup> What is interesting about these two books is the very high level of similarity between rural schools in the Midwest and those in Texas. Although the issue of race and segregation was important in Texas and relatively less important in the Midwest, the general contours of the school day and a child's experience within it were remarkably similar. Another notable exception to the usual writing about children and the schools is Selma Berrol's essay "Immigrant Children at School, 1880–1940: A Child's Eye View" published in the excellent book of essays *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950* edited by Elliott West and Paula Petrik. Based on memoirs and interviews, the essay examines the pains and embarrassments, but also revelations, of immigrant education.<sup>11</sup> Although the author's perspective and sources are largely focused on both coasts, her analysis would be applicable to any situation or place in which immigrant children came into contact with students, teachers, and administrators who did not understand their cultures. Readers wanting to understand the gen-

8. *Columbian History of Education in Kansas* (Topeka: Hamilton Printing Co., 1893).

9. Paul Theobald, *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995).

10. Thad Sitton and Milam C. Rowold, *Ringling the Children In: Texas Country Schools* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1987).

11. Selma Berrol, "Immigrant Children at School, 1880–1940: A Child's Eye View," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*, 42–60.

eral contours of the education of children in Kansas would find all of the cited works helpful, because of the great similarities of children's educational experiences across geographic boundaries.

For Kansas, one extreme of children's educational and institutional experiences can be found in the lives of young Native Americans. Because of the U.S. government's desire to acculturate and assimilate Indian children, those children experienced institutionalization in numbers far greater than non-Indian children. Marilyn Irvin Holt's *Indian Orphanages* includes Kansas institutions such as the Mennonite-run Halstead Industrial School, and David Wallace Adams's *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience* draws upon the history of schools such as Lawrence's Haskell Institute.<sup>12</sup> Even given the particular difficulty of tracing the primary accounts of Indian children, both Holt and Adams have significantly incorporated the voices of those children into their works. Their books give a personal face to the indignities and stresses imposed upon youngsters being housed and educated by an often hostile dominant society.

It can be difficult to find the lived history of children in educational history, and in legal history the problems are much the same. The great irony of this situation is that in finding children and their interests where they were highly visible—in the legislatures, in the law books, and in the courts—children themselves often become almost invisible. Compulsory education, child labor, and child abuse laws all affected the process of growing up, but in writing the histories of these developments, childhood as lived often is disregarded. In other words, although we can easily learn that in 1874 Kansas legislators adopted a compulsory schooling law, historians rarely have explored the impact of this legal development on children's day-to-day experiences. For example, a recent collection documenting the relationship of children to the law, *A Century of Juvenile Justice*, hardly mentions children as historical actors.<sup>13</sup> Instead, adults and the law take center stage. The same is true of LeRoy Ashby's study of child abuse, *Endangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History*. The law and institutions rather than the youngsters they affected are central to the story.<sup>14</sup> One of the few exceptions to this is historian Linda Gordon's *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence*. Because of her access to case records such as those of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Gordon was able, more than most, to bring the voices and experiences of children into her work.<sup>15</sup> Recent studies of adolescent girls who ran afoul of delinquency laws largely because of premarital sexual activity also make use of the types of records that allow the girls to speak for themselves. Because of their access to case reports and court documents within which young women made depositions, Ruth M. Alexander, in *The "Girl Problem": Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930*, and Mary E.

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13. Margaret K. Rosenheim, et al., eds., *A Century of Juvenile Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

14. LeRoy Ashby, *Endangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997).

15. Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1988).



*The voices of institutionalized children, such as these girls in the State Orphans' Home in Atchison in 1937, are rarely heard in our histories, rendering the children themselves nearly invisible.*

Odem, in *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920*, have written histories that reveal young women's own thoughts about their sexuality, as well as parents', reformers', and courts' judgments about girls' actions.<sup>16</sup> By focusing on these highly visible children, in contact with the court system, these researchers have discovered a great deal about the problems of children and families, however, this view of growing up is probably a skewed one. The vast majority of young people had no contact with the courts or the police and were unlikely to be institutionalized. What this far more visible minority experienced may or may not have had much of a relationship to the experiences of the majority. These studies also are rooted in the experiences of young women in major urban areas and may be quite unlike the experiences of those in rural areas and smaller cities and towns where peer and familial pressure may have significantly restricted

teens' behaviors. In these accounts we are more likely to find historical narratives that may help us understand teenagers' lives in Kansas City, Topeka, or Wichita than in Scott City, Jetmore, or rural Seward County.

Adults and their concerns seriously influence the content of children's history in other ways as well. Much of the history of growing up is found in the advice literature on any number of topics surrounding birth, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. One of the best examples of the historical use of this type of literature is Beth L. Bailey's *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. In her book, Bailey examines the ever-so-important adolescent and young adult activity of finding a mate, as idealized in publications such as *Mademoiselle* and *Seventeen*. She follows youngsters from the age of the calling card, through the competitive dating of the twenties and thirties to the steady dating of the post-World War II era. Very important to her story is the role of money in dating and the absorption of consumer culture into dating relationships. Young women prided themselves on being expensive, and young men worked hard to provide ever more pricey and exclusive venues for dating.<sup>17</sup> While it makes for fascinating reading, the book raises as many new questions as it answers. Most particularly, when thinking about the issue of dating and mate selection in relatively rural, often not overly affluent communities, to what degree did expensive corsages, off-the-shoulder formal dresses, and country club dates actually figure

16. Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem": Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995).

17. Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

into the equation? While it is relatively easy to find out how the editors of young women's and men's magazines believed young people in the years from the 1920s to the 1950s should date, it is far more complex to find out the actual substance of dating. From the beginning, however, Bailey informs her readers that she is dealing with the idealized rather than the real, and that they will not necessarily find the dating experience of average Americans, such as rural or small-town Kansans, in her story.

The issue of separating the real from the ideal becomes much more serious when a writer has not separated the two in his or her work, and the ideal is accepted as truth in an unwritten, unrecognized subtext. Such is the case of *Settlers' Children: Growing Up on the Great Plains* by Elizabeth Hampsten. Based on letters, diaries, and reminiscences from North Dakota, Hampsten comes to the generally unsurprising conclusion that life for children on the frontier was hard; they worked long hours, attended school sporadically, and experienced accidents, illness, and general mishap on a regular basis. Her rather surprising assumption based on this evidence from North Dakota is that this experience was excessive and exceptional when compared with the experience of childhood in other places in the United States. She casts parents who took their families into this environment as, at least unconsciously, abusive toward their children.<sup>18</sup> This work promotes, without tacitly acknowledging it, the belief that a very specific set of urban, middle-class, nineteenth-century assumptions about childhood prevailed throughout the nation. Before the Civil War many relatively well-to-do urbanites and reformers came to believe that childhood should be a time of play rather than work, and that children should be sheltered from the painful realities of life. These children were not to be the children of the workplace, but the children of the school, living a relatively carefree existence. What various scholars such as Hampsten have failed to realize is that well into the twentieth century for the vast majority of American children these were proscriptions rather than reality.<sup>19</sup> Farm children of nearly every economic stratum worked on a regular basis. Some, such as those on economically marginal farms, worked much to the detriment of their educations. Poor and working-class urban children, who were more numerous than middle-class children, also labored to feed themselves and their families. Most families could not afford idle children, and many believed that it was damaging to children to raise them to be anything but productive and hardworking.<sup>20</sup> By interpreting proscriptive literature about the nature of childhood as actuality,

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18. Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers' Children: Growing Up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

19. This error is also evident in some other general histories of childhood. See, for example, Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775–1850*. Reinier incorrectly writes, "By the late 1820s and 1830s capitalism began to transform the northeastern economy and penetrate even rural households . . . expectations of children's work began to change. Children in poor families continued to labor, but those in new middle-class or rural families tied to the market (emphasis added) were free to engage in schooling that was no longer intermittent but full time." Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775–1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 103.

20. For attitudes among midwestern families about the importance and virtue of work, see Mary Beth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 20–22. For a good description of the transition of children from economically necessary to economically useless but emotionally priceless, see Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3–21.





*A limited number of works are found on rural childhood, and much of the history of growing up on Kansas farms has been neglected. The boys pictured here are at work on the Fowler farm in Russell County, ca. 1900.*

Hampsten has misinterpreted the nature of childhood in rural Great Plains communities, as compared with the experience with the nation's other children.<sup>21</sup>

*Settlers' Children* points to another serious deficiency in the literature on growing up in America; there are a very limited number of works to be found on rural childhood. Major research guides published in the last two decades list little literature specific to children growing up on the nation's farms.<sup>22</sup> This perhaps is not surprising since rural history in general tends to be neglected by American historians as a group. A glance at the average U.S. history survey textbook will show that matters rural rarely enter into the text, except in discussions of slavery and sharecropping, frontier communities, the Populists, rural-urban tensions during the 1920s, and the Great Depression. The fact that the United States is now considered an urban nation, and has been considered so by the Census Bureau since 1920, has seriously affected how history is written. United States history tends to be presented from the perspective of the coasts and of such major cities as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Throughout most of the nation's history, however, its population was largely rural. Many midwestern and western states, Kansas included, remained predominantly rural even after the transition to an urban nation was well under way in

the rest of the country. As late as 1940 the Census Bureau classified 58 percent of Kansas's population as either farm or rural.<sup>23</sup> The history of rural children is critical to an understanding of growing up in Kansas, but finding that rural childhood can be quite difficult. A few exceptions to this rule include Elliott West's *Growing Up With the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier*, which will be examined further, specifically in reference to Kansas. This work offers good discussions of child life, and particularly children's work, in frontier farming conditions. Mary Neth's *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* is particularly important in defining parental views of the meaning and parameters of farm childhood. She also does a good job in establishing why farm youth increasingly left the countryside as the twentieth century progressed. Several books on orphan trains, such as Marilyn Irvin Holt's *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* and Stephen O'Connor's *Or-*

21. Recommended reading for anyone interested in innovative interpretations of the meaning of work in childhood is Ning de Coninck-Smith, Bengt Sandin, and Ellen Schrupf, eds., *Industrious Children: Work and Childhood in the Nordic Countries 1850-1990* (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1997).

22. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985); Elliott West, *Growing Up in Twentieth Century America: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996).

23. U.S. Department of the Interior, *Sixteenth Census: Population*, vol. 4, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 787.

phan *Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed*, illustrate the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century philosophy of child rearing that led reformers in New York and other eastern cities to send poor children west to rural communities to be raised with the supposed virtues of the countryside. O'Connor's book includes a number of useful case studies following the movement of individual urban youths into their new rural environments. Because farm children are so little a part of the written historical record, much of the history of childhood and growing up in Kansas also is neglected.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the one exception is the history of one- and two-room country schools, the seeming quaintness of which attracts Americans dreaming of earlier days and supposedly simpler times. A number of historians have addressed this issue, with varying levels of concern with children's experiences, and with various levels of criticism for the quality of the rural school experience. *Call School and Ringing the Children In*, both previously discussed, are a part of this trend, as is David Reynolds's *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth Century Iowa*.<sup>25</sup> A very positive treatment of the value of a rural education may be found in Wayne Fuller's *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West*, and an article by Fuller also details country school teaching in Kansas and Nebraska.<sup>26</sup> Firsthand accounts of education in rural schools abound, from those written by teachers to those written by students.

When we move beyond the more general history of childhood to its experience in Kansas, we have to look harder for the available material. It is in a small and somewhat unlikely collection of books that we find explicitly the history of growing up in Kansas. For works that refer to the experience of this state, we must turn to Elliott West, *Growing Up With the Country*; John Ise, *Sod and Stubble: The Story of a Kansas Farm*; and collections of primary sources, including C. Robert Haywood and Sandra Jarvis, "A Funnie Place, No Fences": *Teenagers' Views of Kansas, 1867–1900*; Marilyn Holt, *Model Ts, Pep Chapels and a Wolf at the Door: Kansas Teenagers, 1900–1941*; and Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*. As their titles might indicate, this collection does not in any way create a comprehensive history of growing up in Kansas, either in terms of coverage of the entire experience of childhood, or the entire history of the state, chronologically or geographically.<sup>27</sup>

*The history of rural children is critical to an understanding of growing up in Kansas, but finding that rural childhood can be quite difficult.*

24. Elliott West, *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*; Marilyn Irvin Holt, *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1992); Stephen O'Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2001).

25. David Reynolds, *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth Century Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

26. Wayne Fuller, *The Old Country School: Rural Education in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Fuller, "Country Schoolteaching on the Sod-House Frontier," *Arizona and the West* 17 (Summer 1975): 121–40.

27. John Ise, *Sod and Stubble: The Story of a Kansas Homestead* (1936; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967); see also, Ise, with additional material by Von Rothenberger, *Sod and Stubble: The Unabridged and Annotated Edition* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996). Rothenberger, a freelance writer and native of Osborne County, includes valuable new material in his annotated edition of Ise's 1936 classic. C. Robert Haywood and Sandra Jarvis, eds., "A Funnie Place, No Fences": *Teenagers' Views of Kansas, 1867–1900* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, Division of Continuing Education, 1992); Marilyn Irvin Holt, ed., *Model Ts, Pep Chapels, and a Wolf at the Door: Kansas Teenagers, 1900–1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, Division of Continuing Education, 1994).

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Elliott West's *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier* is not specific to Kansas or to areas beyond the frontier, but it is one of the most thorough and useful histories of Kansas childhood currently available. West writes his history with an eye to frontier circumstances, such as a scarcity of labor and crude living conditions, attempting to explain what made this childhood experience particular and unique. West has considered a number of issues of particular concern to children, from work, play, and growing up to problems of disease and child mortality. He has interspersed his analysis with the biographies of children whose individual experiences are representative of child life on the frontier. What makes the book particularly interesting to Kansans is its extensive use of the remarkable Norton family diaries. These diaries, a copy of which is housed at the Kansas State Historical Society, tell the individual stories of several sons in this Pawnee County, Kansas, family, as well as the collective story of the larger Norton clan. This family of twelve kept a journal in which most of the members wrote at one time or another. West has skillfully woven the Nortons's story into the larger story of frontier childhood, particularly in his discussions of children's work. The story that emerges is one of particularly resilient and resourceful children, who often were better adapted to the conditions around them than were the adults. West's narrative is not specifically one of growing up in Kansas, but it is one that touches on many aspects of that experience. A useful adjunct to West's account is Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith's richly illustrated *Frontier Children*. Again, although the book is not specific to Kansas, it includes a good bit of Kansas material and sufficient high quality visual material to enrich the reader's understanding of the experience of frontier childhood.

The frontier and its influence takes center stage also in another important work about growing up in Kansas. No discussion of this topic would be complete without reference to John Ise's semi-autobiographical *Sod and Stubble*. The book is somewhat difficult to classify. It is the story of John Ise's north-central Kansas family, from the point of view of his mother, Rosa Ise. Some parts of the work have been fictionalized slightly, but Ise's work is underlaid by extensive historical research into pioneer life in Osborne County, Kansas, as well as by interviews with Rosa Ise. While the most important focus of the book is Rosa's experience as farm woman and mother of twelve, it is also the story of those children. Any number of topics germane to the study of childhood in Kansas make their appearance in *Sod and Stubble*. The hazards of birth, infancy, and early childhood are central to this story, which includes the death of the Ise's firstborn child and the near escapes of several others. The continuing threats older youngsters faced from disease and mishap receive great attention, and the reader may be led to wonder how any nineteenth-century child survived to adulthood. Ise's own bout with polio as a small child, and his parents' subsequent ineffective search for a cure for his paralysis, gives the reader a unique opportunity to see the impact of childhood disability and chronic illness on nineteenth-century families. Ise describes children's labor and the centrality of that labor to the continuing economic health of the family. The book is particularly effective in its discussion of the gender division of labor. Education, and especially a child's eye view of the country school, also receives ample attention. Although one might not think of community conflict, such as fights over the placement of roads, as having an impact

on children, Ise shows how those conflicts were carried out not only in the courts among their elders but in the school yard among children. The theme of growing up and leaving the farm is central to the book, as ten of the eleven surviving Ise children pursued their futures outside of agriculture. The intergenerational conflict that went into those choices also is underscored in Rosa Ise's painful decision to sell the family's belongings and move to Lawrence, where several of her children attended the university. Although the Ise family was in many ways exceptional, larger than usual, more educated than usual, more persistent than usual, their experiences were, in many ways, quite similar to those of the average farm family; they faced the same challenges, survived the same conditions, and watched their children make the same decisions about the feasibility of a life in agriculture. No study of children's experiences in Kansas would be complete without *Sod and Stubble*.

Two collections of primary documents, published by the Division of Continuing Education at the University of Kansas, also are essential reading for anyone interested in the history of growing up in Kansas. Haywood and Jarvis, *"A Funny Place, No Fences"* and Holt, *Model Ts, Pep Chapels and a Wolf at the Door*, bring together an amazing variety of sources detailing the lives of youngsters who might otherwise be lost to the historical record. Haywood and Jarvis have collected marvelous diary excerpts from a wide variety of Kansas youngsters, from farm boys such as DeWitt Clinton Grinnell, to Lawrence schoolgirl Margaret Virginia Herrington. The children discuss work, play, relations with family, and relations with the opposite sex, all concerns that transcend their time and place. The volume also includes items such as letters, photographs, excerpts from publications for children, and memoirs. Holt's volume continues where Haywood and Jarvis left off, following teenagers in Kansas through the early years of the twentieth century. This volume relies less on diaries and more upon interviews and reminiscences. Again, the focus is upon capturing the broad diversity of teenagers' experiences. In neither book is the emphasis upon analysis, rather it is upon presenting the experience of growing up in the youngsters' own words. Teachers wanting to present the history of childhood to their students will find much useful material in both volumes. If nothing else, these books are an excellent point of departure for anyone wishing to pursue further study of primary sources on growing up in Kansas. A number of the sources excerpted in these works reside in the archives of the Kansas State Historical Society, an excellent location from which to begin any study of childhood and adolescence in the state.

The final work specific to Kansas is far different from those treated previously. While the aforementioned books deal, for the most part, with the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and with material that is largely noncontroversial, Bailey's contribution to the history of growing up in Kansas is recent, and likely to stir controversy. Beth Bailey's follow up to *From Front Porch to Back Seat* is her 1999 work *Sex in the Heartland*, which examines the development of the sexual revolution through the experience of the young people in Lawrence, Kansas. Bailey chose Lawrence because it is situated in "the state that most consistently represents the antithesis of bicoastal sophistication." Kansas, she argues, is also "the quintessential heartland state," and in that heartland state the youth of Lawrence experienced the sexual revolution in ways that were very similar to national norms. Although Bailey states that Lawrence is not necessarily representa-

*The hazards of birth, infancy, and early childhood are central to the Sod and Stubble story, which includes the death of the first-born child and the near escapes of several others.*



*Adolescence and young adult activity are examined in Bailey's From Front Porch to Back Seat. And in her Sex in the Heartland she follows the development of the sexual revolution through the experiences of the young people in Lawrence. The change in "dating" decorum is obvious in these two photos taken at the University of Kansas in 1926 (above) and 1976 (below).*



tive of Kansas, it is firmly rooted to it. She cites the tax dollars that fund the University of Kansas, the students from across the state who attend school there, and the wide diversity of individuals who live in the town.<sup>28</sup> Lawrence and the University of Kansas provide an opportunity to observe the heartland's young experiencing the sexual revolution. And experience it they did. Bailey describes the evolution of university regulations relating to sex and the struggles among the students, university administration, and Kansas legislature over this issue. She examines the development of a sexual counterculture in Lawrence, including gay and lesbian organizations and activities. One of the more interesting revelations is the history of the birth control pill in Lawrence; in the late 1960s and early 1970s, because of a remarkably free-wheeling local doctor, young and unmarried women there had unprecedented (and medically irresponsible) access to birth control pills. Although the Lawrence of the post-World War II era never had a gay bathhouse or a large red-light district, the young people congregated there reveled in the sexual revolution as much as those in Berkeley, California, or Boston, Massachusetts. It is one story of growing up in Kansas that is a rarely told, one that might surprise the offspring of those earlier sexual revolutionaries, now more than old enough to attend the University of Kansas themselves. Anyone who has lived in or observed a university town, however, may wonder to what degree, if any, the experience of Lawrence was indicative of the larger experience of the state. Large numbers of young people, more or less separated from parental authority, in daily contact with the relatively liberal views of university professors, are unlikely to have the same coming-of-age experiences as those outside this same environment.

The primary sources detailing the history of childhood in Kansas are more numerous, of course, than the secondary materials now available. Various research studies of Kansas children may be examined for historical insights. Those interested in how turn-of-the-century rural Kansas families greeted pregnancy and childbirth should read Elizabeth Moore's 1917 study *Maternity and Infant Care in a Rural County in Kansas*.<sup>29</sup> For a critical look at large and small Kansas schools in the 1960s, see *Big School, Small School: High School Size and Student Behavior*, published in 1964 by Roger Barker and Paul Gump.<sup>30</sup> Firsthand accounts, such as Bruce Bair's *Good Land: My Life as a Farm Boy*, provide vignettes illustrating certain aspects of growing up in Kansas, such as experiencing discipline, learning about sex, and becoming a worker. The book's episodic character limits it as a historical source, but it allows readers a bittersweet glimpse of the difficulties of childhood on a western Kansas family farm.<sup>31</sup> A visit to the Kansas State Historical Society would provide an even greater array of undigested primary sources to the interested reader. Although the list of available primary sources is far too long to enumerate, among my favorites are the Norton diaries, previously mentioned; the beautifully illustrated diaries of Hermann and Bertha Benke, a brother and sister who lived with their parents near Cheyenne Bottoms; and Elma Bamberg's remi-

28. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3–5.

29. Elizabeth Moore, *Maternity and Infant Care in a Rural County in Kansas* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917).

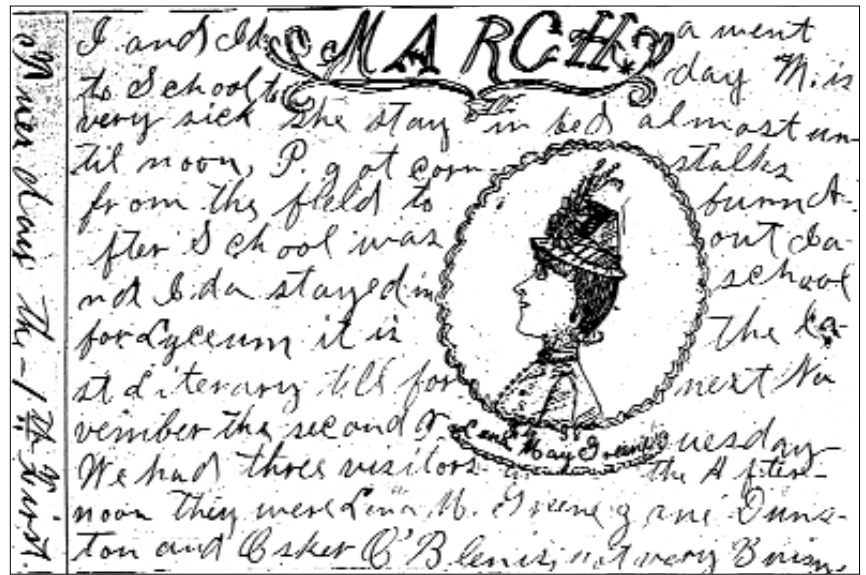
30. Roger G. Barker and Paul V. Gump, *Big School, Small School: High School Size and Student Behavior* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964).

31. Bruce Bair, *Good Land: My Life as a Farm Boy* (South Royalton, Vt.: Steerforth Press, 1997).

niscence "My Home on the Smoky," describing in great detail her childhood days. Anyone interested in the type of printed material available for late-nineteenth-century Kansas children could read *American Young Folks*, a children's newspaper available on microfilm.<sup>32</sup> Additional sources are available in locations such as the Kansas Collection in Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas.

What seems evident from a survey of the history of growing up is that much has been done but much also remains. Researchers interested in briefly surveying currently available material in the field would do well to begin with three recent anthologies and two research guides. The anthologies are Elliott West and Paula Petrik, *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*; N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*; and Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason, *Childhood in America*. The research guides are N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, *A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* and Elliott West, *Growing Up in Twentieth Century America: A History and Reference Guide*. These five sources provide an excellent overview of the research in the field and a number of possible approaches to the study of childhood. Another recommended book, which illustrates the kind of innovative research now being done on childhood, is James Marten's *The Children's Civil War*. Although it is hard to believe that anything completely new could be said about a topic as well studied as the Civil War, Marten proves otherwise. His careful study of children's writings and memoirs, parents' writings, and publications by and for children demonstrate that when viewed through a child's eye, conflicts of more than a hundred years ago can be seen in entirely new lights.<sup>33</sup>

For the individual interested in writing the history of childhood in Kansas, the field is comparatively open. One understudied area of child life involves a set of highly influential institutions: America's churches. The religious lives of children, often very important, remain essentially unstudied. An area of institutional involvement in less need of study, however, is the history of one- and two-room rural schools. Although laws differed and experiences in one state were not identical to those of any other, enough similarities seem to exist among country schools to make further book-length analysis redundant. The frontier experience, too, may



Primary sources dealing with childhood in Kansas are more numerous than secondary materials. Among the author's favorite is the "Diary of Bertha Mary Emily Benke," an illustrated account of Bertha and her brother Hermann's youth near Cheyenne Bottoms in the 1880s.

32. Norton Family Diaries, 1876–1895, copied and annotated by Helen Norton Starr, use in publications by permission of Henry L. Norton, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Bertha Mary Emily Benke, manuscript diary, microfilm, *ibid.*; Hermann C. Benke, manuscript diary, microfilm, *ibid.*; Elma Barnes Bamberg, "My Home on the Smoky," (*ibid.*, transcript).

33. James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).



*Waiting to be written is a history of young African Americans' experiences growing up in racially divided communities. Pictured here are children at play in Waterway Park in Kansas City, ca. 1939.*

not need additional elaboration. Elliott West, Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, and John Ise have provided excellent examinations of growing up on the frontier. But the frontier and its conditions gradually faded, leaving behind a different set of social realities. Established farms remained, as did small towns and cities. And while a history of farm childhood in the Midwest, which includes the eastern half of Kansas, currently is under way, the story of children's small-town and city life has yet to be written.<sup>34</sup> A good starting point to examine these issues is Dorothy Schwieder's new study of family life in Presho, South Dakota, *Growing Up With the Town: Family and Community on the Great Plains*.<sup>35</sup> A second useful model for studying the transition of rural youngsters to urban environments is David Danbom's recent article in *Agricultural History*, "Rural Girls in Fargo During the 1930s." Surprisingly candid sources reveal not only the hardships young women faced in making the transition from rural to urban life, but

also the pleasures, licit and illicit, that they enjoyed in Fargo.<sup>36</sup>


Ethnicity also provides an excellent entry into the study of childhood in Kansas. Historians have been slow to discover the history of Latinos away from the coasts, major cities, and the southwest, and a study of Mexican American youth in Kansas and the Great Plains would be a useful addition to the literature. Additionally, examination of the impact of school segregation in Kansas on African American youngsters might provide a perspective different from the educational studies of the more obvious southern states. The experience of young African Americans growing up in ostensibly integrated but still racially divided communities is also an open, and potentially fruitful, field of study, as illustrated by the memoirs of Frank Marshall Davis, a journalist and poet who grew up in Arkansas City, south of Wichita and just five miles north of Oklahoma. Although

34. For examples of the work I am currently doing on farm childhood in both New Zealand and the American Midwest, see Kathryn Hunter and Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "Rural Daughters in Australia, New Zealand and the United States: An Historical Perspective," *Journal of Rural Studies* 18 (April 2002): 135–43; Riney-Kehrberg, "The Limits of Policy: Rural Children and Work in the United States and New Zealand, 1870–1920," *History of the Family* 6 (2001): 51–67; Riney-Kehrberg, "'But What Kind of Work Do the Rest of You Do?' Child Labor on Nebraska's Farms, 1870–1920," *Nebraska History* 82 (Spring 2001): 2–10; Riney-Kehrberg, "Helping Ma and Helping Pa: Iowa's Turn-of-the-Century Farm Children," *Annals of Iowa* 59 (Spring 2000): 115–40. Portions of the following also discuss the role of girls in Kansas agriculture: Riney-Kehrberg, "Women in Wheat Country," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Spring–Summer 2000): 56–71.

35. Dorothy Hubbard Schwieder, *Growing Up With the Town: Family and Community on the Great Plains* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002).

36. David Danbom, "Rural Girls in Fargo During the 1930s," *Agricultural History* 76 (Fall 2002): 659–68.

his high school was integrated, or “mixed,” as Davis calls it (in 1923 three African American males graduated from high school with him), he experienced his growing-up years and education as a “hellhole of inferiority,” a perspective rarely reflected in histories of small-town Kansas.<sup>37</sup> Also waiting to be written is a historical discussion of the impact of changing sexual roles and standards of behavior in middle America. While much has been written about both coasts, the great middle of the country has largely been neglected. Beth Bailey’s books do a good job of examining proscriptions and the revolutions in behavior in a midwestern college town, but little is offered about how these changes played themselves out among average midwestern youngsters living outside the shadow of a major university. Surely the meaning and experience of growing up, dating, and becoming sexually aware in Larned, Dodge City, or Colby, was significantly different than in Lawrence.

Being young and being a part of youth culture could be dramatically different in different locations. The best illustration of this I have seen is a small photograph taken at my grandmother’s senior picnic. In 1930 she graduated from high school near Pratt, Kansas, the daughter of a not terribly well-to-do Quaker farm couple. A look at this photograph makes it clear that the youth culture of the 1920s had, and had not, made it as far as west-central Kansas. My grandmother and her female friends appear wearing stylish hats and high heels, but what lay in between was far from a contemporary flapper’s garb. Instead of skimpy dresses, low in front and high at the knees, they wore tidy white blouses, silk stockings, and overalls rolled up to mid-calf. When I asked my grandmother why she had dressed as she did, she simply replied that it was the fashion when she graduated from high school. This was the west-central Kansas interpretation of flapper couture, a little more modest than the stereotype, reflecting the more limited economic prospects of the area’s farmers, but sure to cause more than a little consternation from local parents such as my conservative Quaker great-grandfather. The youth culture of the 1920s had sifted down into the least likely of places, but in a form that would have been barely recognizable in Boston or New York. Undoubtedly similar experiences existed in similar locations during the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, before the great standardization of culture took hold in the years following World War II. The story of growing up in Kansas, and not just in terms of modes of dress, was different from growing up on either coast or in states dominated by urban culture. The rural Midwest had its own contours, style, color, and flavor. This is the story that has yet to be told, that should be told, about growing up in Kansas. 

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37. Frank Marshall Davis, edited with an introduction by John Edgar Tidwell, *Livin’ the Blues: Memoirs of a Black Journalist and Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3; John Edgar Tidwell, “*Ad Astra Per Aspera*: Frank Marshall Davis,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Winter 1995–1996): 270.